

Riff Tempo

Everyone's favorite and most valued guitarist of all time was Riff Tempo who occupied room number four in the front, which was the largest and had three windows and where the most and best jams were happening. He had a full set of drums and although he didn't own a set there was always a set there that belonged to the drummer he was jamming with at the time. Sometimes there would be another set put in the corner that another drummer would have there because he would want to play on his own set. He had two bass guitars. One was a Gibson fretless and the other was a really high end B.C. Rich.

He preferred playing a B.C. Rich because he admired one of rock best guitarist, Rick Derringer, who played a B.C. Rich and who Riff had all his albums and the one he did with Johnny and Edgar Winters. So he had a B.C. Rich Mockingbird and a Gibson Les Paul copy. He couldn't afford a genuine Gibson Les Paul guitar, most guitarist couldn't, but he had a very good Les Paul copy that sounded just as good. When he was young he could afford a guitar. He grew in the projects near Summer Street and would hang around over at Russo Music on Bridge Street and try out guitars. Jerry Gendreau owned the music store that sold instruments and gave music lessons. It was the best place to buy, sell or trade an instrument and even bump into someone you knew.

Other music stores would open but they never lasted that long. Russo's had something they never did. A genuine unbending interest in the community of Lowell and the people who were in it. Jerry played in bands around Lowell and played with bands in many other surrounding states especially in New York City where he traveled a lot and had come to know everybody and his brother who played and recorded in the city. He had many friends who came from Lowell that lived there now and had many ties there. Some years he would have more gigs in NYC than around Lowell. He didn't make as much cash as he would have in Lowell but he got to play with some big name local musicians there lived there.

Jerry made everyone and anyone that entered his music store with respect and joy. He knew all the local musicians and would regularly check out the gigs they performed at whenever he could. Even if they came in his music store or ever purchased equipment there. He was content and grateful to be connected to and living and having a business in Lowell and being part of the community he loved.

Riff first began getting interested in playing guitar he would hang out at Russo's whenever he could without coming off as a pest. He was maybe ten or twelve when he started go there and didn't even play yet or have a guitar. He had a friend named Kenny Blanchard that started playing guitar around the same time and was around the same age, who had a guitar that Riff would play on when they got together. Kenny just had an inexpensive acoustic guitar but it was a excellent instrument. Riff and Kenny would grow up knowing about and playing and collecting the best guitars and instruments.

Then Riff got into his teen and had been playing for a few years started to work on and repair and sometime modify guitars and even restoring rare guitars that were pieces of shit when he got them and made them look brand new.

When Riff first started hanging out at Russo's he just went there to check out the guitars and see what they had. He was a young man but he was very hip on the activities that were going on in Lowell. This included not only everything you could see and notice out in the open day in and day out but mostly everything happening underground or off the radar and not normally noticed or apprenticed by most people. He knew and was tight with everyone who he knew wouldn't screw him over and he could trust. Even when he was not even five years old. He had a honest giving nature and genuine people would pick up on it as soon as they meet him and become friends or associates for life.

The first day Riff walked into Russo's Music it was a busy day. It was early afternoon and students were coming and going with various teachers that gave lessons there from guitar or bass or a brass or woodwind instrument to drums and percussion.

If someone came in looking to learn an instrument and if Jerry didn't have a teacher that did he would find one in a day or two and have that person teaching at the store. Even if there was only one student but if someone starting teaching there with an instrument that no one else taught they would usually get more students and build up the number they taught.

Jerry always knew and picked the best people even if it was someone he didn't get along with that well as long as they behaved properly when they gave

instruction and while they were in his store and mainly that they were good teachers and would help develop students that would stay interested even long after the stopped being students. You didn't have to buy something if you went into his store. He was always glad to see you. If you were down on your luck and were forced to sell your guitar or amp or any instrument you had Jerry would always give you a good deal and buy it for a decent price. If you ever came back at any time if it was still there he would sell it to you more than what he paid but a lot less than he could have gotten if he had sold it to anyone else that came in.

Riff strolls in and is looking around. The place is a mad house. Two people are waiting to try out guitars. Someone is trying to get Jerry to come down on a price. Two different rooms have students and the teachers doing scales or whatever they were suppose to learn or at least be familiar with. Riff is looking around at all the equipment that Jerry has and realizes that if he see a guitar that he would like to try out he would have wait his turn and he does.

He listens and observes all that is going on and is cool about how its best to integrate into the environment and take in whatever he can while he is there. After a while it slows down and Jerry says to Riff how can I help you young man? Jerry had noticed Riff after he came in and got a good vibe about him and got the feeling he had his shit together by the way he had acted while in the store. Riff said he would like to play an electric guitar but had only played on an acoustic so maybe he should try out an acoustic. Jerry said: Why don't you give an electric a try if you've never played one. I'll let you play it through an amp. Which one would you like to check out?

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Riff asked if he could play out the Gibson Les Paul and Jerry said you got it and got the amp and cable ready while Riff took down the guitar. Jerry gave him the guitar strap and turned on the amp and adjusted the volume after Riff had put on the guitar. He played a few chords and adjusted the tuning to get every string in the right pitch. Then he play a few things he had learned while hanging out with his best buddy Kenny. It wasn't much compared to what he would be doing just weeks if not days later but Jerry could tell he was not only a natural but also comfortable in his own skin and was probably smart enough and wise enough even at his young age to withstand the struggle a musician will have to go through mastering any instrument and this kid certainly had it. Riff played some blues he had learned and put a little tasteful lead in then just went through the whole guitar checking the frets and the action. Then Turned off the the amp,took off the guitar and put bit back. Jerry asked what he thought and he said it was pretty

good and he would have to think about buying a guitar any time soon but I'll be back. Jerry told him to stop by any time he wanted and he did. Every time any musician or anyone he knew was going to Russo's Music he would tag along. He never took lessons there but he was there a lot and brought in many friends to buy musical equipment and hang out with the music crowd.

As he got older in his teens and early twenties he had made so many good friends and musician buddies that he could have done anything with his life. I bet he could have been a brain surgeon if he wanted to. He had what it takes to do anything in life and he did more than most not only in how he lived but also how he lived with people.

He was a record collector at one time and had complete libraries of the bands he considered worthy of listening to and collecting. The ones that he valued the most was Frank Zappa, King Crimson, Captain Beefheart, The Fugs, and many of the blues dudes like Howling Wolf, Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson and B B King.

He collected imported albums with bands like Gong, Van Der Graff Generator, Gentle Giant and a few others. He also really loved jazz and dug musicians and bands that his musician buddies seemed to avoid and not be into. Maybe because they were into Rock. He saw Jean Luc Ponty twice and George Duke both in Boston.

Once he heard Chick Corea and Return To Forever his whole outlook on his life and how he created music dissolved. It was time for new adventures in playing and composing that he had never imagined. It included lots of musicians and styles of music he had never heard of before. Al Dimeola Bill Bruford, a singer from the past Al Bowelly, and even groups like Doctor Hook and The Kinks. He had all their music. The sad part is that during rough times he would sell all his albums or lend them and never get them back. All those bands helped make his creativity what it became and not only changed him and gave his own life meaning and a purpose but also helped give purpose and meaning to all the people he met in life.